



AXE FACTS

The INFO Source for GR Users

Volume IV / No. 2

Revolutionary Weapons



Q.) What's the difference between a Stealth fighter and the Roland VG-8?

A.) One uses new super-high technology to take you beyond anywhere you've ever been before, the other is a plane.

This year, Roland's revolutionary guitar processor, the VG-8 V-Guitar System, has received more attention and press than ever before. It has been more in demand than ever before, and we have been asked more questions about it than ever before, from the simple: "What is the tracking speed of the VG-8?" to the complex: "What's the difference between the VG-8 and the GR-30 guitar Synth?" Considering the increasing awareness of the VG-8 in the media as well as the marketplace, the many questions we get about it, and the recent cool upgrades just added to it (more on this below), we would like to take this opportunity to address some of your questions and to re-acquaint the world with the incredible V-Guitar system, the Roland VG-8.

WHAT IT IS... The VG-8 is a guitar processing instrument that digitally creates the real sounds of real guitars and real amps, as well as effects such as reverb, delay, flanging, chorusing, phase shifting, and many others. It does this by using a technology called COSM that stands for Composite Object Sound Modeling, an advanced form of sound modeling invented by Roland. It also can produce new, synth-like sounds by employing another Roland-invented technology, HRM (Harmonic Restructuring Modeling). Unlike guitar synthesizers, which, like most modern synthesizers, use digital sample-playback

technology to emulate the sounds of pianos, strings, horns, drums, organs, and many other sounds, the VG-8 uses the actual waveform of the guitar you are playing to generate sound. One of the benefits of this technique is that there is no tracking delay whatsoever!

Another benefit is that you don't just hear a sample, or digital recording, of a guitar, as you would with a good keyboard or guitar synthesizer, you hear all the aspects and nuances of the guitar sound, like what the guitar would sound like if the volume control were turned down slightly, or if the pickups were moved a few inches, (or many inches - all the way to the 12th fret, if you want!) or what a J C-120 would sound like coming out of a full 8 x 12 stack of speakers, with a metal bodied guitar tuned down to open D.

With its unique polyphonic pitch-shifters, the VG-8 is also capable of creating and remembering alternate tunings. Not only can you create and play almost any guitar imaginable, but you can also tune it any way you want, without re-tuning your own guitar! This can be a somewhat disconcerting experience if you are doing this while playing a guitar that you can hear well acoustically, since you will hear the guitar's actual pitch and the VG-8's new tuning at the same time, but the consider the possibility of not having to re-tune (continued on Page 3)

A Brief History of Roland GR Guitar Synthesis

Part 3 of a Series

To say it caused a stir when it was first released back in 1984 is like saying the Beatles were just another band from Northern England. Even today, 14 years after it was introduced, guitar players still remember and talk about the Roland product that changed the way we think about guitar synths: the GR-700, and its companion guitar, the truly unique G-707.

In the '80s, guitars with non-traditional shapes, such as Flying V's, Explorers, "Star-Bodies," and many others were very trendy and popular. It seemed like each guitar maker was trying to outdo the others with new, radical shapes. But the Roland G-707, with its trapezoidal body and radical stabilizer bar, outdid them all. Looking more like a Star Wars prop than a guitar, the G-707 had a bolt-on neck, two humbuckers, a trem. tailpiece, and a unique black stabilizer bar running parallel to the neck, which gave the G-707 its memorable space age look. It made an impression on many well-known players, such as Jimmy Page, Alan Holdsworth, and Andy Summers, who posed for a famous Roland poster using his G-707 with his GR-700 synth. The G-707 was available in three colors: black, silver and red, and came with a special case.

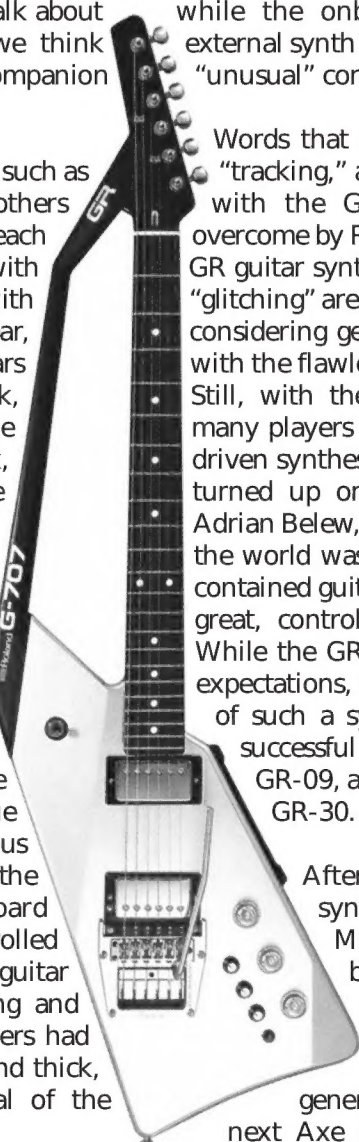
The synthesizer part of this truly innovative system was the GR-700. This was the first true synthesizer for guitarists, and it was a serious synth. It had the same synth "engine" as the successful and sophisticated Roland keyboard synthesizer, the JX-3P, and with digitally controlled oscillators and onboard MIDI, for the first time guitar players had access to the same sound-making and programming technologies that keyboard players had long enjoyed. The sounds were terrific - full and thick, and guitarists were amazed by the potential of the system.

The difficulty arose when they tried to shred. The technology available for pitch detection and MIDI conversion was not nearly as good in 1984 as it is now, and this made the GR-700 System very unforgiving. While it

was the first MIDI guitar synth, it was primitive by today's MIDI standards. It was slow to send notes via MIDI, and it did not send any pitch bend data, so that while the onboard synth sounds might bend, the external synth would not, causing some unintentionally "unusual" combinations of sounds.

Words that some guitar synth players still use, like "tracking," and "glitch" arose from early experiences with the GR-700. These issues have long been overcome by Roland's recent blazingly fast and accurate GR guitar synthesizers. Even today, tracking speed and "glitching" are concerns for some guitar players who are considering getting into synthesis but are not familiar with the flawless performance of modern guitar synths. Still, with the development of the GR-700 System, many players recognized the potential of a real guitar-driven synthesizer, and the sounds of the GR-700 soon turned up on albums by Led Zeppelin, the Police, Adrian Belew, and many others. It was also the product the world was ready for: a powerful, floor-based, self-contained guitar synth, especially one that could sound great, control MIDI, and track fast and glitch-free. While the GR-700 System fell short of some of these expectations, it certainly showed the musical potential of such a synth, and paved the way for the most successful of the Roland guitar synths, the GR-1, GR-09, and the newest and fastest of them all, the GR-30.

After the release of the GR-700, digital synthesis and MIDI developed very rapidly. More and more instrument makers were building better MIDI compatible synths and signal processors. With new digital technology emerging, and as a pioneer of MIDI, Roland developed the next generation of guitar synth products. In the next Axe Facts, we will explore these two rack mounted, full MIDI-implemented units: the powerful GM-70, capable of generating up to 14 MIDI channels from one guitar, and the GR-50, the first Roland guitar synth to use the new, improved 13-pin GK-2 system.



The **NEW** BOSS TU-2 Chromatic Tuner Pedal

The new BOSS TU-2 Chromatic Tuner—the first BOSS tuner in a compact pedal format. It uses the same industry-standard digital processing tuner technology as the famous BOSS TU-12 series tuners, with some cool new features:

- USE IT ON THE FLOOR, in line, with the rest of your pedals. To tune, just stomp to select true mute or bypass. Nobody will hear you tune!
- ITS BRAND-NEW STREAM METER DISPLAY.

This very bright LED display indicates pitch by light stream direction and speed; great for tuning on darkened stages.

- SEVEN EASY TUNING MODES: Chromatic, Guitar Regular, Guitar Flat, Guitar Double Flat, Bass Regular, Bass Flat, and Bass Double Flat. The TU-2 can easily and accurately hear notes as low as the lowest string on a 5-string bass tuned down a whole step to low A!





We love reader questions here at **Axe Facts**. In fact, we love them so much we send a **FREE T-shirt** to the reader with the best question each issue! So if you've got a question or comment, or if you want to stump the experts (these are our favorites), please write to us at **Roland Corp. U.S., 7200 Dominion Circle, Los Angeles, CA 90040 Attn: Axe Facts**.

Q. What should I get: the VG-8 or the GR-30?

This is a very common question, but a very difficult one to answer simply. It's kind of like asking, "What should I get, a Jeep or a Jet-ski?" It depends on what you want to do. The GR-30 and the VG-8 are completely different things. The GR-30 is a true synthesizer, with many features that you would find on any pro keyboard synth, such as 384 multi-sampled sounds, many of which are the accurate sounds of other instruments: pianos, horns, organs, strings, etc. It is also capable of converting guitar notes into MIDI, so you could play other synths with it as well, or go direct to a computer for sequencing or scoring. It also has several unique features like the Arpeggiator, which can create separate rhythms automatically from each string, and the Synth Harmonist, which creates intelligent harmonies from just one note of the synth. The VG-8 is something else again. We have recently re-introduced the VG-8, now called the VG-8EX, and a complete explanation of this amazing instrument is featured in this issue. The best answer to this question: Get 'em both!

Q. I've seen video owners manuals for other Roland products. Is there going to be one for the GR-30?

Timing is everything! The brand new GR-30 video owners manual is now available! You can order it directly from the Roland SuperStore by calling (800) 386-7575.

Q. What is the best guitar to use to play a guitar synth?

This is a great question, and the winner of this month's T-shirt giveaway. You have quite a few choices. Several guitar manufacturers build guitars that have our divided pickup system installed internally at the factory, like Fender's cool, new

GR-Ready Standard Strat, and several others. Or, you can use any electric or steel-string acoustic guitar you already have, and put our GK-2A surface-mounted divided pickup on it. Or if you want the pickup and electronics inside, get the new GK-2A Kit and have it installed. While it is a little easier to put the GK-2A on some guitars than on others, the bottom line is this: Use whatever guitar you like to play. If it has metal strings, and the GK-2A pickup is placed correctly, it will work perfectly. If you prefer nylon strings, you can still play guitar synths; Godin makes some fine nylon string GR-compatible guitars for players who prefer a classical feeling instrument. The simplest answer to the question is: Whatever guitar you want. The guitar doesn't really have an effect on the performance of the synth (unless it's of very poor quality).

VG-8 (continued from Page 1)

to de-tune! Many pro players use it just for this function. The possibilities are limitless!

WHAT'S NEW... Many guitarists who have become interested in the VG-8 recently have noticed that it has become hard to get. It is true that there have been limited supplies of VG-8's for much of 1998, but this is about to change. The most recent version of the VG-8, which will be called the VG-8EX, will begin to appear in August, and will offer some very welcome upgrades: First, the VG8S-1 System Expansion, which gives the VG-8 much more memory, pickup models, guitar models, (including a truly uncanny acoustic guitar), and much more, is now included and built-in, which means when you get a new VG-8EX you get it fully loaded! Also, the new VG-8EX comes with a new "E" bank of 32 new factory programs, with some incredible, killer new sounds. Third, and maybe most exciting, the U.S. retail price of the VG-8 has been reduced to only \$1,695! In today's economy, one good guitar is more than that! With a VG-8EX you could have over 200 different new good guitars, amps, effects and HRM sounds! There has never been a better time to check out this incredible, truly revolutionary product. But don't wait too long...other guitarists are also reading this!

CHECK OUT THIS COOL VG-8 WEBSITE!

For net-savvy musicians there is a very cool VG-8 Website: www.vg-8.com. It has some very insightful and objective comments about this amazing instrument. This is not a Roland sponsored or Roland-created Website. But we recommend it highly. Check this one out!



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In This Issue:

- The Incredible VG-8EX
-More features
at a lower price!



- GR Guitar Synthesis
History-Part 3



- Questions & Answers
- **New** BOSS AD-3 Pedal!
- **New** BOSS TU-2 Pedal!

The **NEW** BOSS AD-3 Acoustic Instrument Processor Pedal



The new BOSS AD-3 Acoustic Instrument Processor pedal makes acoustic guitars sound better through amps or PA's, in an new all-metal, 2-pedal floor unit. Its cool features include:

- The incredibly quiet and superb sounding 2 x 2 Stereo Chorus BOSS designed specifically for acoustic guitars. The chorus can be activated via a built-in footswitch.
- A new Auto-Feedback Eliminator. Just step on the footswitch-it automatically finds the feedback point and eliminates it...in one second!

- Terrific sound-shaping capabilities, thanks to new "Bottom" and "Top" 2-way active filters for maximum tone variety.

- A newly developed "Plate" digital reverb for a richer live sound.

- A unique special "amp selector" that allows you to play your acoustic through a regular guitar combo amp with full range sound, like a good acoustic amp.

If you play amplified acoustic guitar live, you've just gotta try the new BOSS AD-3!